

# Part 1

## Idioms and Definitions

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### A

#### ACE IN THE HOLE

a hidden but effective means of winning a conflict

1. The other team thinks they can win this basketball game, but that's only because we haven't put our best player in yet. He's our *ace in the hole*.
2. It looked like the politician would lose the debate until he brought up his *ace in the hole*, an argument that nobody could refute.

The expression originates from some forms of the card game poker, in which players have both community cards and private ("hole") cards in their hands. To have an ace in one's private hand means that one can win the game without others suspecting ahead of time.

#### ACE UP (ONE'S) SLEEVE

to have an effective but hidden means to accomplish something

1. It looks like Joanne is going to lose, but I wouldn't be too sure. She may have an *ace up her sleeve*.
2. No matter how many times I think Paul might lose to me in a game of chess, he never does. He always has an *ace up his sleeve* and wins every game.

The expression originates from card games like poker, in which players might hide an extra ace up their sleeves to use in case they were losing the game and wanted to cheat.

#### ACHILLES' HEEL

a person's weakness or the vulnerable spot in his or her character

1. We've got to find his *Achilles' heel* if we hope to defeat him.
2. John appears to be a highly respected citizen, but I'm sure he has his *Achilles' heel*.

Achilles was a figure in Greek mythology who was invulnerable in battle except for his heel. It was the one weak spot on his body.

#### ACID TEST

the most crucial or important test of worth

1. Parents might be willing to buy this new toy for their children but the real *acid test* is whether or not the children themselves like it.
2. The *acid test* for laundry soap is not how well it cleans in hot water, but how well it cleans in cold water.

The expression originates from the use of nitric acid on gold to determine whether the gold was genuine.

#### ACROSS THE BOARD

equally for everyone, for everything, or in all cases

1. The boss made some people angry. He gave 5% pay raises *across the board* but some people thought they should have gotten more than others.
2. The car dealership was cutting prices *across the board*. Every car was on sale, not just a few.

#### ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

the things that people do (actions) are more important than the things they say (words)

1. She's promised to be nicer to her sister from now on, but *actions speak louder than words*.
2. Every politician will claim that he or she cares about the problems of the average person, but *actions speak louder than words*.

This expression implies that we can learn about a person's true intentions by looking at what they do rather than what they say.

#### ALBATROSS AROUND (ONE'S) NECK

something or someone that is a burden and difficult to get rid of

1. That car costs you so much to repair. It has become an *albatross around your neck*. Why don't you get rid of it?
2. I hired my wife's brother to work in my business but he's worthless. He doesn't do anything. He really is an *albatross around my neck*.

Synonym: *millstone around (one's) neck*

An albatross is a large sea bird. The expression comes from the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel T. Coleridge, in which a sailor shoots a helpful albatross with a crossbow, bringing bad luck on the crew of the ship. The other sailors hang the bird around the sailor's neck as punishment.

## ALL KIDDING ASIDE

speaking seriously

1. That was a good joke, but *all kidding aside*, we have to get to work now.
2. What you're telling me sounds unbelievable. *All kidding aside*, are you serious?

## ALL THUMBS

uncoordinated and awkward, especially with one's hands

1. I've tried to put this toy together according to the instructions, but I'm *all thumbs*. I can't seem to get the parts to fit.
2. Peter seems to be *all thumbs* today. He keeps dropping his tools.

## ALL WET

wrong to the point of being silly or unbelievable

1. He's *all wet* if he thinks I'm going to believe his lies.
2. Don't listen to Maria. She doesn't know what she's talking about. She's *all wet*.

Compare to: *not know beans about (something)*; *out to lunch*; *for the birds*; *talk through (one's) hat*

## ALONG FOR THE RIDE, GO/COME

to be present for an activity without taking part in it

1. Janet's brothers went up into the mountains to do some fishing. Janet doesn't fish, but she *went along for the ride*.
2. I don't need to do any shopping, but perhaps I'll *come along for the ride* if that's okay with you.

The expression suggests that the ride itself is the extent of the person's participation in the activity, and that the person does not take part in the activity that is the purpose of the ride.

## APPLE OF (ONE'S) EYE

a person or thing that is precious or loved above all else

1. Richard is so attached to his daughter that he would do anything for her. She's the *apple of his eye*.
2. The boy won't behave in school, but you can't convince his parents. He's the *apple of their eye*.

Centuries old, this expression stems from the ancient belief that the pupil of the eye was solid and shaped like an apple. The pupil was considered precious since one could not see without it.

## ARMED TO THE TEETH

well-equipped with weapons

1. The police won't enter the bank where the thief is. He's *armed to the teeth*.
2. The invading soldiers were *armed to the teeth*. There was no way the defenders could hope to win.

The expression suggests having weapons (arms) from one's toes to one's teeth.

## AS THE CROW FLIES

directly or in a straight line, without roads

1. The town is 25 miles from here *as the crow flies*, but it's over 40 miles by car.
2. *As the crow flies*, the airport isn't very far, but you can't get there directly. You have to drive around the mountains.

The expression is used to describe the distance between two points as an airplane or bird might fly, without taking into account the twists and turns in the road.

## AT LOGGERHEADS

in strong disagreement, in a quarrel; at an impasse

1. They have been arguing all day about what to do. They really are *at loggerheads*.
2. John and Richard are *at loggerheads* about what would be a fair price for the car. John thinks Richard's price is far too low.

## AT (ONE'S) WITS' END

at a loss about what to do next; in a state of frustration

1. When the woman looked around and couldn't find her little daughter, she looked up and down every aisle in the store until she was *at her wits' end*. She was almost hysterical when another customer in the store suggested that she notify the store's security officer.
2. We can't seem to persuade our son to stay in school. We have tried every argument we can think of, but nothing seems to help. We don't know what to do, and we're *at our wits' end*.

Synonyms: *at the end of (one's) rope*

Compare to: *keep (one's) wits about (oneself)*; *use (one's) wits*; *scared out of (one's) wits*

The word *wits* means mental abilities.

## AT THE DROP OF A HAT

on any pretext; without needing an excuse or reason

1. Those workmen look for any reason to stop working. They'll put down their tools *at the drop of a hat*.
2. Nancy really doesn't want to stay in her present job. She'll leave for another one *at the drop of a hat*.

### AT THE END OF (ONE'S) ROPE

no longer able to deal with a bad situation

1. I just don't know what to do with my son. He has misbehaved all day. I'm *at the end of my rope*.
2. We can't tolerate that dog anymore. We're going to give it away because we're *at the end of our rope*.

Synonyms: *at (one's) wits' end*

### AX TO GRIND

a hidden reason for wanting something or for not liking someone or something

1. Don't listen to Claudia when she tells you how bad that teacher is. She has had *an ax to grind* since he failed her last year.
2. Why do you keep telling me not to buy anything from that store? Do you really think they sell bad products, or do you have some kind of an *ax to grind*?